

# Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

**What is avian influenza (bird flu)?**

Avian influenza, or bird flu, is caused by flu viruses found in birds. There are different kinds of bird flu. The one that scientists think could be dangerous to humans is H5N1.

**What kinds of birds carry bird flu?**

Some wild birds carry the virus. It does not usually make them sick. Domestic birds like chickens, ducks, and turkeys can also carry it. They may get sick or die. In the United States there have been 16 cases of bird flu in poultry since 1997, but none of these illnesses were caused by H5N1.

**Can other kinds of animals become infected with bird flu?**

Yes, but it is not common.

**Can bird flu spread from birds to people?**

The virus can change to become dangerous to both birds and people. This is rare. It has only happened a few times since 1997. These cases probably occurred because people were in contact with infected birds, bird feces or bird remains.

**Can I catch bird flu from a sick person?**

Right now the bird flu virus is not very contagious. It does not spread easily between people. In fact, there have only been one or two cases of one person catching bird flu from another person.

**How long can the bird flu virus survive outside the body?**

No one is sure. The virus could survive for days on surfaces after it is expelled by coughing or sneezing.

**Who is most at risk for infection from the bird flu?**

People working with poultry outside of America are at risk.

**Is there a test for bird flu?**

There is no test your doctor can use to find bird flu. Only advanced laboratories have tests to detect bird flu. If there is an outbreak these laboratories would supply your doctor with information to make the right diagnosis.

**How do I know if I am sick with bird flu?**

If you become sick with the flu, it is most likely just the common seasonal flu. If bird flu is found in your area then a doctor will be able to provide you with a diagnosis and recommend treatment.

**What are the symptoms of bird flu in people?**

Symptoms could include fever, body aches, cough and tiredness.

**What treatment is there for bird flu?**

Bird flu may be treated with antiviral drugs. These drugs require a doctor's prescription. People sick with any kind of flu should rest and drink plenty of liquids. Sick people should also not use alcohol or tobacco. People with the flu can take medication for symptoms.

**Is there a vaccine for bird flu?**

The flu shot offered each year for seasonal flu does not offer protection against bird flu. Scientists are working to develop a bird flu vaccine for H5N1, but it will be some time before it is approved for use.

**Is it safe to eat chicken or turkey?**

Scientists do not believe you can get bird flu from eating infected poultry or eggs. However, to protect yourself from food-borne illnesses, always store and handle uncooked meat safely, wash your hands before and after handling meat and cook it to a safe internal temperature.